

New Evidence for the Surprisingly Significant Propaganda Role of the Central Intelligence Agency and Department of Defense in the Screen Entertainment Industry

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Abstract

This article reassesses the relationships of the Central Intelligence Agency and Department of Defense with the American entertainment industry. Both governmental institutions present their relationships as modest in scale, benign in nature, passive, and concerned with historical and technical accuracy rather than politics. The limited extant commentary reflects this reassuring assessment. However, we build on a patchy reassessment begun at the turn of the 21st century, using a significant new set of documents acquired through the Freedom of Information Act. We identify three key facets of the state-entertainment relationship that are under-emphasized or absent from the existing commentary and historical record: 1. The withholding of available data from the public; 2. The scale of the work; and 3. The level of politicization. As such, the article emphasizes a need to pay closer attention to the deliberate propaganda role played by state agencies in promoting the US national security state through entertainment media in western societies.

Keywords

censorship, CIA, DOD, Hollywood, media communications, propaganda, television

Introduction

Method and Literature: The Need to Refocus on Entertainment Production Processes

When examining the political nature of a piece of entertainment, we can variously consider the intentions and motivations of its creators, how meaning is encoded in the text itself, or audience

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reception. All three are important and legitimate approaches within media studies but it is a striking feature of the literature that so little is written about the role of the US national security state, most prominently embodied by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Department of Defense (DOD), in shaping the content of screen entertainment.

This tendency to shy away from production analysis has been exacerbated and legitimized by the postmodern turn, the pervasive influence of Freudian analysis, and the cross-disciplinary emphasis on audiences. Ed Herman, co-creator of the propaganda model (PM) that attempts to account for the uncritical nature of elite media discourse, explains that such a focus on micro-issues of language, textual interpretation and gender and ethnic identity is ‘politically safe and holds forth the possibility of endless deconstruction of small points in a growing framework of jargon’ (1996: 13). Consequently, Hollywood journalist Ed Rampell (2005) can argue that ‘movies are our collective dreams’ and ‘emanations of the collective unconscious’ (p. 12). Influential film critic and scholar Robin Wood (2003) commented that movies are ‘as at once the personal dreams of their makers and the collective dreams of their audiences’ (p. 78). US entertainment, it seems, is to be interpreted and reinterpreted *ad infinitum*.

In contrast, when analysing authoritarian forms of governance, scholarship invariably assumes considerable state influence over entertainment systems and that they are used as crucial tools to spread misinformation and disinformation (Hoffmann et al., 1996; Proway, 1982; Qin, 2017; Reeves, 2004; Taylor, 1998; Welch, 2001). Similarly, although critical scholars of US news media have suffered marginalization in academia, even here there has at least long been a body of material about the role of the state in shaping discourse for its own ends by authors like Carl Bernstein (1977) and Ed Herman and Noam Chomsky (2002) and watchdog organizations like the Glasgow Media Group and Media Lens.

We also recognize that there is a respectable body of work that demonstrates how entertainment – going back to the origins of Hollywood in early 20th century America – represents US power (Boggs and Pollard, 2007; Burgoyne, 2010; Kellner, 2010; McCrisken and Pepper, 2007; Prince, 1992; Scott, 2011; Westwell, 2006). One of the authors on this article, Matthew Alford, engaged similarly in a mainly text-based set of readings for his early work (2008). What has long been lacking, though, is a robust body of scholarship on how the state actually affects productions. Here, we show that a major reason for this deficiency is the difficulties associated with acquiring useful documentation, largely the reluctance of state officials in releasing it.

There was a brief flurry of new books and articles on state involvement in the entertainment industry around the turn of the century, but each of these was decidedly narrow in scope. David Eldridge (2000) and Frances Stonor Saunders (1999) concentrated on the early Cold War, with their new material on cinema being limited to their discovery of an official at Paramount Studios who sent letters to an anonymous CIA contact explaining how he was using his position to advance the interests of the agency in the 1950s. In two major early 21st century studies, Suid and Haverstick (2002, 2005) systematically document the relationship between the military and Hollywood. However, remarkably – particularly given the detail with which he writes and his unique access to source material – Suid does not question ‘the legitimacy of the military’s relationship with the film industry’ (noting that Congress permits it 2002, p. xi) and characterizes the Pentagon entertainment liaison chief Phil Strub as ‘simply a conduit between the film industry and the armed services’ (Suid and Robb, 2005: 75, 77). A scattergun and journalistic account by David Robb (2004), the only other researcher we know to attain even partial, temporary access to the same set of documents as Suid, highlights numerous cases typically ignored by Suid that point to much more politicized and controversial impacts by the DOD. In short, Suid utterly dominates the source material and his macro and micro analyses are, in light of our new analysis, little short of a whitewash (Alford, 2016; Alford and Secker, 2017).

From 2014 to 2017 we made numerous requests to the CIA, US Army, Navy, and Air Force with regards to their cooperation on films and television shows. It quickly became apparent that there had been a huge surge in the number of television shows supported by the DOD, especially since it decided circa 2005 to begin supporting reality TV. The authors compiled a master list of DOD-assisted films and TV using IMDB, the Entertainment Liaison Officer (ELO) reports and DOD lists, and miscellaneous files, which produced a total of 814 film titles, 697 made prior to 2004, and 1133 TV titles, 977 since 2004. Lawrence Suid had missed a handful of DOD-supported films and has not updated his lists since 2005, so neither he nor any other author had documented the huge scale of DOD support for television. Added to that, in 2014 the CIA's first ELO, Chase Brandon, published a full list of dozens of film and television shows on which he had worked, which was many more than any previous public records had indicated. The White House, Department of Homeland Security and the FBI had also been involved, as shown by infrequent news reports. By all measures, even without considering the role of less politically controversial entities like the Coast Guard and NASA, the US government has been involved with the entertainment industry on a scale several times greater than the latest scholarship has indicated.

This article shows that the characterization of the DOD and CIA ELOs as minimally and passively involved in the film industry, merely receiving and processing requests for technical and other production assistance, is inaccurate. To do so, we identify three key facets of the state-entertainment relationship that are under-emphasized or absent from the existing commentary and historical record: 1. The withholding of available data from the public; 2. The scale of the work; and 3. The level of politicization.

The Withholding of Available Data from the Public

The largest library archive about the DOD's influence on entertainment is held at Georgetown University and curated by Lawrence Suid. The authors and several colleagues of different ages, genders, and levels of academic experience requested access to these files. Suid rejected each request. In his clearest refusal to share material, Suid explained that, 'I trust you will understand the difficulty I would have in opening my files while I am still using them',¹ though he has not generated any new analysis since 2005. In 2004, Robb highlighted some egregious examples of the DOD exerting political influence over Hollywood scripts. Despite his extensive discussion of the archived documentation, Suid's books have made no direct reference to the politically-motivated changes on numerous films, including: *Clear and Present Danger* (e.g. removal of racist language by the President); *Tomorrow Never Dies* (e.g. removal of a joke about the US losing the Vietnam War); *Contact* (e.g. changing a scene that makes the military appear paranoid); *Thirteen Days* (e.g. an attempt to convince the producers that the Joint Chiefs had behaved responsibly during the Cuban Missile Crisis); *Windtalkers* (e.g. a scene depicting a historically accurate Marine war crime was removed) – as discussed below – as well as *Tears of the Sun* (the military prevented the depiction of 'nasty conspiracies'); *The Green Berets* (e.g. references to the illegal US bombing of Laos were removed); *Rules of Engagement* (e.g. the lead character is 'toned down'); *Black Hawk Down* (e.g. a scene depicting the military machine gunning wild boar is removed); and *Goldeneye* (the nationality of a duped American Admiral is changed), as discussed in Alford and Secker's 2017 book. Although Suid gives good coverage of film releases that have been denied cooperation, he chooses not to comment whatsoever on productions that were terminated due to the DOD's refusal to cooperate, including *Countermeasures*, *Top Gun II*, and *Fields of Fire*.

Direct approaches to the DOD's ELO have also proven to be of dubious utility. Strub claimed 'I stopped keeping paper records long ago. I don't maintain electronic ones, either' and that a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request could only disclose, at best, a 'brief entry in an incomplete data

base'. He suggested we contact Suid, which only serves to highlight how the presence of Suid has helped insulate the DOD from the FOIA (Strub, 2014). Actually, although the 'incomplete data base' is mostly lacking information about the degree of political influence and script changes brought to bear by the DOD, it does contain some relevant new data and it helped clarify the scale of DOD support to entertainment products. Despite this, the overwhelming majority of the new data concerns what the military provided to the filmmakers in terms of access to people, locations and vehicles and does not record what the Pentagon asked for in return. Similarly, our request to the US Navy for copies of script notes on recently-supported productions resulted, after well over a year's delay, in a response saying that they do not keep copies of script notes (2017). We appealed and provided them with a copy of their own notes on *Lone Survivor*, released to another requester, but no further information has so far been forthcoming.

The available CIA records regarding their involvement in and influence on entertainment products are even more scant. While hundreds of pages of emails and memos regarding *Zero Dark Thirty* were released in response to a FOIA lawsuit, the equivalent records regarding other CIA-supported productions have never been released. Secker and others have requested files on *Argo* and *Top Chef* – which unlike *Zero Dark Thirty* were even granted permission to film at CIA headquarters – but the CIA's responses say they cannot find even a single document.²

The same problem applies to the Chase Brandon era (1996–2006) in the CIA's liaison office. According to his successor, Paul Barry, when Brandon left the Agency in late 2006 he took all his papers with him, and so 'nothing remains from the past' (quoted in Jenkins, 2009). Tricia Jenkins' work suggests two alternative reactions to this hole in the CIA's records: (1) that it does not make much difference because, as producer Michael Beckner put it, 'everything he did with the CIA was done on a handshake and a phone call' (Jenkins, 2016: 69) and so Brandon's paper-trail was probably minimal anyway; and (2) that it might matter enormously because extensive memos show that Chase Brandon was responsible for essentially ghost-writing the film *The Recruit* and so, presumably, he used this written method for a considerable body of material. The 2016 edition of Jenkins' book *The CIA in Hollywood* cites documents from an unspecified court case proving how:

[Brandon's] role far exceeded the one that even an aggressive studio executive or producer would play in the development of the film ... one can't help but wonder why [writer Roger] Towne and [producer Jeff] Apple allowed Brandon to have so much creative control over the original script unless it was always understood to be a CIA written film disguised as an independent production. (p. 87)

Jenkins concludes that 'it is clear that Brandon was far more involved in some films' actual development than anyone outside of the industry previously imagined' (p. 87).

Overall, then, institutional secrecy makes it impossible to assess the true scale and nature of the political influence wielded on Hollywood by these two institutions, especially the CIA. We only know that in some well-documented instances it is fundamental to the politics of these entertainment products (we discuss some examples below). The CIA seems to have taken its popular refrains like 'the secret of our success is the secret of our success' and applied them to its work on entertainment productions. In the wake of Robb's criticism, the DOD further limited public access to source materials that reveal script changes by replacing the twentieth century style of paper trail with more circumspect and anodyne diary-style activities reports. This lack of transparency could presumably be quickly reversed, were it not for a mindset that does not want the public to know.

The Scale of the Work: The Number of Around 575 DOD-Assisted Films in Suid's Books is Already Well Over a Decade Out-of-Date

Our figure of 697 is higher than even Suid has documented, though in the vast majority of these cases we have nothing more than a list from the DOD or an IMDB credit to say that anything occurred. The files we have received through the FOI combined with other sources indicate that the DOD supported 814 films between 1911 and 2017, which is over 200 more than Suid's latest published list from 2005. We are certainly not saying that Suid compiled a bad list, especially since we know first-hand how hard it is to cover every production, but he has at least missed some from his era. Moreover, he never lists the figures himself – we have to count and it's not entirely clear from his rubric which products were subject to script revisions. Nor does he systematically display DOD cooperation with TV at all.

If we include the 1,133 documented TV titles in our total count, the number leaps to 1,947 productions. If we are to count the individual episodes for each title on long-running shows like *24*, *Homeland* and *NCIS*, alongside the influence of other major national security organizations like the FBI, CIA and White House, then the figure would be in the thousands. While the DOD is by far the most active, the CIA takes the same approach with considerable success and has affected dozens of projects. It is time to recognize the roles of both the CIA and DOD in screen entertainment as being extensive, covert, pro-active and highly politicized.

The Available Historical Archives and Histories Say Virtually Nothing about the DOD and CIA's Involvement with Other Screen Entertainment, Namely Television and Video Gaming

Despite Suid's encyclopedic list of movies, comparable histories have never been produced on the work of the DOD in the television or computer games industry. While most histories and discussion of the ELOs focus on their overt and obvious role in war films and disaster movies, the Army's reports mention assistance granted not just to movies but to an enormous range of series including chat shows, sports coverage, military-themed reality shows, other reality TV, competitive reality series, cooking-themed reality TV, game shows, action adventure series, dramas, children's programming, awards shows, military and non-military documentaries, and independent films including foreign productions from Belgium, Japan, Denmark, Holland, Switzerland and Sweden.³

The CIA's Involvement in a Significant Number of Entertainment Products Was either Not Known or Not Discussed Publicly in Any Context Until 2014

Jenkins used credit listings and occasional comments by CIA officers in the press to identify productions the CIA has assisted. These included *Alias*, *JAG* and *24*, and the handful of films mentioned on relevant IMDB pages. In the years since, more information has become available showing that the CIA have been involved in a considerably larger number of films and TV shows.

In 2014, Brandon updated his personal website to include the names of not just films and TV shows on which he worked but also of people he worked with in the entertainment industry. While his IMDB page lists only three films from his time as the ELO he also helped to produce comedies like *Meet the Parents* and its sequel *Meet the Fockers* and historical retellings of past CIA operations like *Charlie Wilson's War* and *The Good Shepherd*. This combination of promoting the CIA through action and comedy and revising history through cinematic drama is similar to the way the

DOD liaises with the entertainment industry. In total, while Brandon was running the CIA's ELO, he worked on 12 major feature films, 11 TV shows or series, and had some kind of involvement in at least 10 other television productions as well as several books and unfinished film projects.

Among his creative 'partners' Brandon listed producer Jeff Apple and screenwriter Roger Towne, both of whom worked on *The Recruit*, detailed elsewhere in this article. Brandon also listed producer Lorenzo Di Bonaventura, who is responsible for the DOD-supported *Transformers* franchise as well as the *Salt* and *Red* franchises. *Salt* credits a former CIA officer Melissa Boyle Mahle with providing consultancy on the project but director Phillip Noyce – who previously made *Patriot Games* with CIA assistance mentions on the DVD commentary that the whole creative team had a video conference with currently-serving CIA operations officers while they were writing the script. This can only have happened with official CIA approval. *Red* does not credit any consultants or technical advisors, but former CIA officer Robert Baer is featured on the DVD commentary talking about his role in helping to produce the film. On top of Brandon's work, if we include former CIA agents providing production assistance, then the number goes up to over 20 major TV series and at least 29 films since 1996.⁴ It is reasonable to ask, given the institutionalized secretiveness, whether the number is even higher.

The DOD and CIA Do Not Always Admit to Supporting Screen Entertainment Products and They Do Not Always Provide Support Through Their Formal ELOs

Both Strub and Brandon have denied working on productions to which they demonstrably did provide assistance. The world's most financially successful film franchise the Marvel Cinematic Universe has enjoyed overt, admitted Pentagon assistance in several of its productions. Despite this, Strub claimed that the DOD withdrew cooperation from *The Avengers* because 'We couldn't reconcile the unreality of this international organization [S.H.I.E.L.D.] and our place in it' (Ackerman, 2012). This didn't stop National Guard soldiers and vehicles appearing in the film and Strub and the heads of the Army's and Air Force's ELOs John Clearwater and Francisco G. Hamm were all thanked in the credits. Strub, Hamm and Clearwater's IMDB pages do not mention their involvement in *The Avengers*, and the DOD and the National Guard's own lists released under the FOIA do not include *The Avengers*.⁵ Suid blithely mentions 13 films under 'unacknowledged cooperation', including the James Bond film *Tomorrow Never Dies* – which Strub outright denied to us had received DOD support.

The updates to Chase Brandon's personal website enable us to show that he was engaged in similar activity. Brandon denied granting technical assistance to *The Bourne Identity*, saying in one interview (Patterson, 2001) that it was 'so awful that I tossed it in the burn bag after page 25'. However, he starred in a short 'making of' featurette on the Special Edition of the DVD for *The Bourne Identity*, where he expresses how much he enjoyed the film and praises its realism (DVD, 2002). In a later interview, Brandon said 'we did a trailer on the DVD' (Williams, 2009) but he also listed the film among his technical advisor credits when updating his site in 2014 – an indication that his involvement was greater than just assisting with a trailer. Brandon has given similarly ambiguous statements about his involvement in the TV show *24*.⁶

The Level of Politicization

At times the DOD has shown itself unwilling to see or hear the most durable and well-evidenced facts from history, where they run contrary to its political interests. The entertainment industry and the examples that follow demonstrate that the CIA and DOD are primarily and explicitly concerned

with promoting a positive self-image and propagating a useful version of history and politics where they play a critical and benevolent role. They have repeatedly sought to have dialogue, scenes and sequences that contradict this desired image changed or removed from scripts in the development phase. While this observation will not be surprising to some, it is not made clear in public pronouncements and available historiography. While the usual justification for involvement in the entertainment industry is recruitment to the armed services, the following examples establish that the DOD's agenda is broader and more politically motivated:

- *Thirteen Days* (2001): Negotiations fell through between the DOD and the producers. After reading the script, the DOD demanded several changes that, if implemented, would have resulted in the film being factually in opposition to the historical record of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. White House audio tapes demonstrate that as the President was leaning towards a Naval blockade of Cuba, Joint Chief of Staff General Curtis LeMay was aggressively arguing in favour of an invasion. Strub wrote, 'Both General LeMay and General Maxwell Taylor are depicted in a negative and inauthentic way as unintelligent and belligerent' (Robb, 2004).

Likewise, Strub asked the producers to remove one scene in which a U2 reconnaissance pilot is shot down and killed over Cuba. The reasoning provided for this request was that it didn't happen, even though the DOD's own records show that this pilot was posthumously honoured for his final U2 flight over Cuba. The film's producers sent Strub a copy of the letter of condolence that President Kennedy had written to the widow of the pilot but they received no reply (Robb, 2004: 55).

- *Windtalkers* (2002): The DOD negotiated with the producers to ensure that the film did not explicitly say that the Marine command ordered its men to kill its Navajo soldiers if captured, even though Robb shows that this is an historical fact established by Congress (Robb, 2004).

Two other sequences were excised from the original script as a result of DOD demands. Firstly, a sequence where a Marine stabs a dead Japanese soldier in the mouth to retrieve a gold filling. 'The activity is unMarine', was the view of the DOD, insisting on its removal and trying to pin the blame for such activities on conscripts. This is despite National Archives footage, cited by Robb, of a Marine yanking teeth from the jaw of a dead Japanese soldier. Secondly, the original script sees the hero (Nicolas Cage) kill an injured Japanese soldier who is attempting to surrender by blasting him with a flame-thrower. The DOD complained and the scene was deleted (Robb, 2004: 64). In keeping with the overall image of the DOD as a positive force in a dangerous world, another scene is retained in which a Marine is brutally shot in the back by Japanese soldiers while he is handing out chocolates to children is retained.

- *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* (2016), *Contact* (1997), *Hulk* (2003): In these three films elements were changed or removed in order to demilitarize aspects at the DOD's behest. In *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* the DOD's database describes how, '[t]he script portrayed a US Army transport brake failure, resulting in it hitting a group of Afghani shoppers in Kabul, killing and injuring them. This was changed to an NGO vehicle' (DOD, 2017).

On *Contact* the Pentagon thought that there was '[o]riginally a fair amount of silly military depiction' so they '[n]egotiated civilianisation of almost all military parts' (DOD, 2017). For example, when the protagonists are discussing whether to build a machine based on extraterrestrial

blueprints, the panicky line ‘It could just as easily be some kind of Trojan Horse. We build it and out pours the entire Vegan army’ was ultimately given to a National Security Advisor rather than the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

For *Hulk* the DOD requested ‘pretty radical’ script alterations in exchange for Marine Corps support including: changing the desert lab where the Hulk is created into a non-military, privately-owned facility; making the ‘baddie’ an ex-military character who runs the lab, rather than a serving officer; removing dialogue about ‘all those boys, guinea pigs, dying from radiation and germ warfare’; and changing the codename of the operation to capture the Hulk from ‘Ranch Hand’ to ‘Angry Man’ since Ranch Hand had been the name of a real chemical warfare programme during the Vietnam war (USMC, 2017).

- *Clear and Present Danger* (1994): The original script depicted US foreign policy in less favourable terms than the final movie. For example, the US President says of the Columbian drug lords in the movie, ‘Those sons-of-bitches... I swear, sometimes I would like to level that whole damn country – and Peru and Ecuador while we are at it’ (Robb, 2004: 35). The offending line was deleted along with any Presidential references to ‘payback’, ‘Bustin’ some butt’ and his calling the dealers ‘monkeys and jabaloneys’ – all as a result of the demands of the DOD, according to Robb (2004: 37).

The DOD also made clear its ‘obvious objections to portraying the highest level of US government engaging in illegal, covert activities’ (Hogel, 1993). Two notable ideas suggested by the DOD were for the on-screen President to establish to the Joint Chiefs of Staff ‘that young Americans are dying in the streets because of this illicit drug activity in South America. The audience will clearly understand ... the drug runners will not be seen as “innocent” or “unarmed”.’ Similarly, The DOD asked for the on screen F15 fighter jets to be shown to be under direct threat from the drug barons (Greer, 1993). Both ideas were implemented.

The CIA functions with a comparable set of political preconditions as the DOD. When working on 2003 spy thriller *The Recruit*, Tricia Jenkins used a document leaked exclusively to her to report how Brandon scripted a scene depicting the head of the Clandestine Service addressing fresh recruits. The character states: ‘I know you have a lot of questions ... and one of them may be whether or not there will be real operational work here now that the Cold War is over.’ He then uses former CIA Director James Woolsey’s refrain: ‘We did slay the great dragon. But in the new world order we are learning that there are a multitude of poisonous snakes’ and adds: ‘These dangerous serpents have deadly names. Can you identify some of them?’ The leader explains how countering terrorism is the Agency’s ‘number one priority’, echoing the response of one of the recruits, before others suggest the proliferation of mass destruction, transnational crime syndicates, and the theft of intellectual property rights, not to mention a list of set of state actors: North Korea, Libya, Iran, Iraq, Colombia, [and even] Peru (Jenkins, 2016). This scene explicitly seeks to reiterate the importance of the CIA’s changed but still crucial role in the post-Cold War world.⁷ Other scenes in *The Recruit* encouraged viewers to believe that the Agency did not fail in the years leading up to 9/11 but was actually busy preventing numerous similar attacks, while the public remained unknowing. These elements of the film were almost certainly the result of Brandon’s influence, says Jenkins (2016).

There were similarly multiple changes made to *Zero Dark Thirty*. Documents obtained by Judicial Watch show how the CIA leaned on Boal to remove or change several scenes in the movie, including one where a drunken CIA officer fires an AK-47 into the air from the roof of a building

in Islamabad. This was removed at the CIA's request (CIA, 2012). They also asked that the film-makers change a scene involving the use of dogs to intimidate prisoners and one showing the protagonist Maya physically carrying out torture.

The DOD has also played a critical role in preventing certain products from being produced. One was a screenplay called *The Smoldering Sea*, on which the DOD refused to collaborate because it 'shows the Navy in a very objectionable light' (Robb, 2004: 356). Another was a film based on the book by Clay Blair (Robb, 2004: 353–355), which portrayed Navy Admiral Hyman Rickover very well but which Rickover personally opposed as he was not allowed full production control. Finally, there was *Top Gun II*, which was floated in the early 1990s but which the Navy refused to work on because the original film had been associated with the 1991 Tailhook Convention scandal in which over 100 US Navy and Marine Corps aviation officers were alleged to have sexually assaulted at least 83 women and seven men, or had behaved in an 'improper and indecent' manner – leading to damning media coverage and a critical DOD Inspector General's report (Robb, 2004: 182; see also DOD Inspector General, 1993). Predictably, Suid just uses the DOD's own description of 'rowdy behaviour' to describe 'Tailhook' (Suid, 2002: 234).

Beyond these examples there are two other known instances of the DOD terminating productions: *Countermeasures* and *Fields of Fire*:

Countermeasures. In 1994 this film was in development but production was halted because the DOD refused to collaborate. The DOD refused on numerous grounds that were beyond technical and were, in fact, explicitly political. In Strub's view the depiction of Navy personnel was 'completely unrealistic and negative ... unprofessional ... and unapologetically sexist if not guilty of outright sexual harassment or assault'. He went on to note that, '[m]aking the principle villain an agent of the (then) Naval Investigative Service fosters a negative perception of the service, implicates all agents by association, and reinforces the allegations of a lack of professionalism that was widely reported by the media over the last few years'. The words 'lack of professionalism' probably refer here mainly to the aforementioned Tailhook scandal. One other reason for the DOD's rejection of *Countermeasures* was references in the script to Iran-Contra, an operation where the CIA sold weapons to Iran and where some of that money was then used to support the Contras in Nicaragua. Strub commented, 'There's no need for us to denigrate the White House, or remind the public of the Iran-Contra affair', which is again an explicit rejection of a proven political scandal (Strub, 1993). When the Spanish Navy heard that the DOD had turned it down, they followed suit. The filmmakers needed access to an aircraft carrier to be able to make the film so the DOD's decision effectively terminated the production (Robb, 2004: 46).

Fields of Fire was a mid-1990s film-in-development under the direction of James Webb, a Vietnam veteran who became Secretary of the Navy and then Virginia's state senator. In September 1993, Webb officially asked the DOD for assistance, specifically Marines to serve as background actors and access to shoot footage of aerial vehicles. The DOD refused because the script included numerous scenes that they found objectionable on the grounds of PR, not on the grounds of accuracy. Sequences depicting Marines fragging, committing arson, brutalizing and murdering people and posing for a photo with their arm around a dead Enemy Prisoner of War (EPOW) were all problematic for the DOD. A member of the Marine Corps' Public Affairs Officer (PAO), Lt Col Jerry Broeckert, wrote to the Navy's Director of Public Affairs J. M. Shotwell explaining that the Marine Corps had issues with supporting the film due to the 'admission in this medium that those activities occurred in Vietnam' (Broeckert, 1993). Surprisingly the USMC approved granting assistance to the script, but Strub wrote to W. E. Boomer, Commandant of the Marine Corps, saying that the audience, ignorant of the realities of war, 'is

very likely to conclude not only that these tragic events occurred routinely but also that they represent the typical behavior of our military forces when placed under the duress of combat' (Strub, n.d.). These concerns were enough for the DOD to refuse assistance to *Fields of Fire* and so the film died on the vine.

The CIA has also managed to prevent the advancement of film projects, which seemed set to go ahead had they not become involved. The PAO retains the right to approve any publication by CIA personnel, so it is possible that prospective scripts are just completely unknown. In the early Cold War period, the Agency refused the producers' requests for assistance on films like *My Favorite Spy* (CIA, 1951). There are several documented cases of CIA harassment of former employees turned authors, including Victor Marchetti, Frank Snepp and Phillip Agee (Moran, 2015). In 2016, Nicholas Shou substantiated a story that the CIA derailed a Marlon Brando picture about the Iran-Contra scandal by establishing a front company run by Colonel Oliver North to outbid Brando for the rights.

Conclusions

The existing literature on the operations of the DOD and CIA ELOs is inadequate because it fails to account for the enormous scale of the phenomenon and its politicized, secretive and proactive nature.

When we first looked at the relationship between the national security services and motion pictures around the turn of the 21st century, we accepted the consensus opinion that state propaganda in the entertainment industry consisted of little more than a small office at the Pentagon, which had assisted the production of around 200 films throughout the history of modern media. This was flat out wrong.

A recent CIA Office of Inspector General (OIG) report into the Agency's engagement with the entertainment industry highlights the difficulties that academics and journalists face when trying to research this subject. The OIG's review took place in the wake of the scandal over secret information being given to the filmmakers behind *Zero Dark Thirty*. The report studied eight projects that the ELO had worked on, out of 22 in total between 2006 and 2011, including *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Argo*, documentaries for the BBC and the History Channel, the spy drama *Covert Affairs* and an episode of *Top Chef*.

The OIG criticized the ELO for poor record-keeping – there were no records on three out of the eight projects and only limited records for the other five. They also objected to the ELO for not having conducted an assessment of the consistency or effectiveness of their policies on granting or denying assistance to projects. Perhaps most seriously, the OIG admonished the ELO for breaching security protocols designed to protect classified information. The report notes how some meetings between entertainment industry representatives and CIA officers took place outside of CIA facilities, sometimes with the officers under cover, sometimes without any guidance from the Office of Public Affairs (OPA) before the meetings, and often without anyone from the OPA being present. This quasi-deniable relationship between the CIA and the entertainment industry means that even its own OIG cannot conduct a proper review of their operations, let alone researchers or the press. The lack of accountability is profoundly undemocratic. The number of 22 projects between January 2006 and April 2012 shows that after Chase Brandon's departure the CIA's operations in the entertainment industry continued on a similar scale.

The Pentagon has often intervened in the political and social dimensions of private-sector movies and entertainment products featuring military hardware or dramatizations of war and 'national security' matters. This has taken place especially in the preproduction phase, including in scripts, when withdrawal of military assistance may lead to cancellation of the movie project. While the

CIA has far fewer cinematic assets and therefore less leverage over creative decisions, they have also demonstrated the ability to make substantial and politically-motivated changes to major movies.

Indeed, it appears the DOD have taken a leaf out of the CIA's playbook as it has recently sought to become involved in entertainment productions from the earliest stages of the creative process. From 2010 to 2012 the Pentagon's ELOs met with agents from William Morris Endeavor, one of the largest talent agencies in Hollywood, the heads of production for the 'Group of 8', and senior executives at Warner Bros and Columbia Pictures. The ELO reports state that the purpose of these meetings was for the DOD to find out how to better 'enter studio projects early in the development stages when characters and storylines are most easily shaped to the Army's benefit' and so they could, 'get involved early in the production timeline on potential projects and programs so we can help shape the topics before they are finalized by the studio executives' (US Army, 2015). The most recently released documents show that the Air Force are inviting Hollywood executives on extended tours of military facilities to generate contacts and provide opportunities to 'discuss Air Force storylines that [Air Force Public Affairs] is interested in highlighting' (USAF, 2017). This more proactive approach is identical to the Chase Brandon era when, according to CIA chief of public affairs Bill Harlow, Brandon spent 'many hours' on the phone pitching ideas to writers (Jenkins and Alford, 2012). As such, while the CIA's involvement in Hollywood is on a smaller scale than the DOD, the *modus operandi* of the two agencies is increasingly similar.

The CIA and DOD's ability to alter the politics of our entertainment, without having to acknowledge publicly that they are doing so, raises fundamental ethical, legal, democratic and even epistemological concerns. In Alford's own earlier work, building on Ed Herman and Noam Chomsky's propaganda model, an inherent assumption is that the media industry filters out material that challenges powerful interests in a typically *passive* manner. What this latest research shows is that we cannot be complacent. The state is substantially more involved in the *active* manufacture of consent through entertainment than has been previously demonstrated.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Notes

1. Alford personally contacted Suid on 13 December 2011. Other colleagues have met with similar responses.
2. In 2016 Secker filed Freedom of Information requests for files about the filming of *Argo* and *Top Chef* at CIA headquarters and the CIA's responses to both of these requests said they could not find any relevant records.
3. TV titles supported by the DOD include *Ellen*, *Queen Latifah*, *Army Wives*, *Extreme Makeover*, *Dixie Divas*, *Dances with the Stars*, *American Idol*, *The X-Factor*, *Big Kitchens*, *Cupcake Wars*, *Restaurant Impossible*, *Nashville Cupcakes*, *Catch 21*, *Wheel of Fortune*, *The Price is Right*, *Hawaii Five-O*, *Sirens*, *Sesame Street*, *the Emmys*, *the BET Awards*, *The Country Music Awards* and *Ancient Aliens*. We pieced together the DOD's involvement in TV from office reports from the entertainment liaison offices obtained via FOIA requests.
4. These numbers come from a combination of information from Chase Brandon's website, movie and TV credits on IMDB, and a handful of media interviews and CIA documents.
5. The Army ELO's own reports note how for *The Avengers* they 'agreed to requests for support; access to White Sands Missile Range and a company of Soldiers for the climactic battle scene'. The documents also note how one of their officers who worked on *The Avengers* sat on a panel at ComicCon 2011, which

- the Army saw as 'a great opportunity to reach out to future comic book filmmakers' and a 'key annual outreach and networking event' (US Army, 2015).
6. In the 2001 Patterson interview, Brandon said that he 'withheld approval from 24' but in a later interview he contradicted himself. In 2005 he claimed that 'we weren't involved at first because they didn't ask'. If the makers of 24 did not ask back in 2000–2001 then how could he have initially withheld approval? Brandon went on (Williams, 2009) to say 'Now they have ... so we're doing more to help them out.' His website lists 24 among his technical advisor credits but, bizarrely, former CIA Chief Counsel John Rizzo said (A Strange Bond, 2007) that 'For the record ... the producers of 24 have never approached the Agency for anything.' It is clear that Brandon did work on 24 but it is equally clear that the CIA is being self-contradictory on this matter.
 7. Senator Patrick Moynihan introduced two bills advocating for the abolition of the CIA in 1991 and 1995. The CIA established its ELO in 1996.

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